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F.B.I. WAS GIVEN AID BY STEINBRENNER

Cooperation in Security Case Acknowledged by Officials

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 20 — George M. Steinbrenner, the principal owner of the New York Yankees, made the facilities and personnel of his shipbuilding company available to the Government in a national security matter in the 1970's, Federal law-enforcement officials said today.

The officials would not disclose details about the matter. A spokesman at the Federal Bureau of Investigation said the bureau was under instructions not to discuss the case because of its sensitivity.

Other Federal law-enforcement officials said Mr. Steinbrenner had cooperated with the F.B.I. and other Government agencies in a national security matter that involved using ships to monitor the movement of other vessels.

The officials said the case involved several agents of a "hostile intelligence service" who were posing as businessmen. Mr. Steinbrenner, whose company apparently had business dealings with the men, was asked by the F.B.I. to cooperate in the surveillance of the suspects as part of an internal security investigation. The officials said they did not know the nationality or identity of the agents.

It was not clear today exactly what sort of purported espionage activities the foreign agents were engaged in, or if they were ever charged with criminal activity.

Mr. Steinbrenner is the chairman of the American Ship Building Company in Cleveland. The company builds oil tankers and other large vessels.

Federal officials said the company's dealings with the Government involved, among other things, the use of its repair docks in Tampa, which is one of the nation's largest repair facilities.

They said the story of Mr. Steinbrenner's involvement in a national security matter first emerged in a lawsuit filed by Mr. Steinbrenner against a group of people in Florida, West Virginia and New York whom he accuses of defrauding him in oil, gas and coal securities deals.

One of the people deposed as part of the suit, which was filed in Tampa, was a former F.B.I. agent, Philip McNiff, once the head of the bureau's office in Tampa who later went to work for Mr. Steinbrenner. He told lawyers that Mr. Steinbrenner had once been involved in a national security matter, Federal officials said.

Mr. McNiff subsequently refused to answer questions about the matter, and his attorney, Bernard Dempsey Jr., said that he had notified the Justice Department that a sensitive national security matter had been raised.

Federal law-enforcement officials said today that the F.B.I. had confirmed that Mr. Steinbrenner made American Ship Building available to the Government for purposes of gathering intelligence information about vessels at sea.

Mr. Steinbrenner could not be reached tonight with the Yankees in Oakland, at his horse farm in Ocala, Fla., or at his home in Tampa.